Keywords and Cultural Change: Frame Analysis of *Business Model* Public Talk, 1975–2000

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Keywords chronicle and capture cultural change by creating common categories of meaning against diverse local usages. We call this the global-local tension. *To test competing theories of this tension, we employ frame analysis of more than 500 journal abstracts over a 25-year period, tracking the spread of* business model *as an economic keyword generated during unsettled economic times. Analyses reveal the simultaneous adoption of "global" and "local" frames without one supplanting or co-opting the other. The global-local tension is conciliated by providing primacy across communities of discourse to a small collection of frames (i.e., the global presence) while maintaining a plurality of local use within communities (i.e., the local alternative).*

KEY WORDS: keywords; cultural change; frame analysis; business model; Digital Economy.

INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to *Keywords*, Williams (1976) recalls that when he returned to Cambridge after World War II, he noticed that people with whom he would converse no longer seemed to be "speak[ing] the same language." He felt perplexed by the rise of dramatically "different formations," that is, changes in what the words he was using and hearing meant (1976:10). He realized that different groups of people intended different meanings for

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what he called "keywords," words like *culture*, *capitalism*, and others that described societal faultlines.

A *keyword* is a word or phrase, often mobilized by different groups of social actors for different purposes, whose meanings are contested during unsettled times. Keywords incorporate ambiguous and often competing ideas and are sites where global meanings meet local, varied subcultural interpretations. Analogous to PET imaging scans that use radioactive isotopes to trace changes in the human body, a keyword can be thought of as a semantic isotope: a cultural tag, tracer, or dye that tracks changes in meaning deployed by diverse social actors during periods of change. Keywords chronicle and capture cultural change by creating common categories of meaning against the cacophony of contested local use (Abrahamson and Fairchild, 2001; Becker, 1982; Bourdieu, 1992a; Strang and Meyer, 1994; Strang and Macy, 2001). These public conversations are manifest in documents produced by individuals, groups, formal organizations, and social movements (Lewis, 2002; Ventresca and Mohr, 2002; Wuthnow, 1987).

Contests over keywords are heightened during times of cultural change (Spillman, 1997; Wuthnow, 1987; Swidler, 2001b). Cultural change itself is catalyzed by a variety of conditions and often contested (Anderson, 1983; Friedland and Alford, 1991; Phillips *et al.*, 2000). The source of such "unsettled times," that is, eras marked by loosened normative frameworks and increased ambiguity (Swidler, 1986), include broad socioeconomic shifts occasioned by wars or changes in political opportunities (McAdam, 1982); the dislocation of social or cultural structures (Sewell, 1996); challenges to the "moral order" (Wuthnow, 1987); the generation of new ideas by small groups of "critical thinkers," disseminated via political movements (Rochon, 1998); the emergence of revolutionary technologies that usher in "gales of creative destruction" (Schumpeter, 1942; Spillman, 1995), and fluctuations in the economy (Williams, 1973). The common point is that incumbent rules of the game are less compelling under certain conditions. During these times, people search for and create new meanings to structure their lives. Keywords assist in this process by orienting everyday action.

Investigating how keywords take on new and multiple meanings is a useful empirical strategy for observing evidence of cultural change (e.g., Abrahamson, 1997; Barley and Kunda, 1992). Sewell (1996), for example, explores the invention of the keyword *revolution* during the taking of the Bastille in the summer of 1789 by examining public talk in the meeting minutes of the National Assembly. Sewell shows that the word acquired its modern usage through a series of occurrences that linked the notion of popular sovereignty with crowd violence, displacing prior meanings of the word that did not include the imagery of political reordering. Through a careful reconstruction of historical narrative, Sewell highlights that keywords such

as *revolution* and certain others took on new meanings that helped order a political environment in turmoil and transition. Keywords, therefore, introduce new conceptions of what really exists, of what is valuable, and of what is possible.

THE PROBLEM

Keywords are recast with multiple, locally tailored meanings, yet they help to organize cultural change by creating common, global categories of meaning. In other words, there is a tension between producing a keyword that is at once specific to local contexts while remaining general enough to engage a collective, global audience. This boundary work is what gives keywords analytic value. We term this the *global-local tension.*

Wuthnow (1989) uses comparative and historical analyses of the great social reformations of modern times to conceptualize an analogous puzzle he calls "the problem of articulation." This problem concerns how communities of discourse—identifiable groups that articulate ideas in common—infuse new meanings into keywords that simultaneously resonate with local meanings while engaging a global audience. Wuthnow examines the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the rise of Marxist socialism to theorize ways in which political ideologies were shaped by and yet managed to transcend their specific environments of origin. Wuthnow tracks instances in which social movements advocate for changes in political order, religious doctrine, and regimes of meaning that have institutional consequences. These groups of actors make claims in the face of material and ideological opposition from incumbents. In studying these "communities of discourse," Wuthnow emphasizes the role of public talk, social actors who produce dissenting discourse, and the institutional consequences of political competition in unsettled times of cultural change.

We examine struggles over keyword meanings within and across professional communities of discourse. We change the unit of analysis from the physical actor to the keywords over which the communities of discourse compete. Inspired directly by the title of Wuthnow's work, *Communities of Discourse*, we investigate the time-varying usages associated with a keyword common to several professional communities. We develop the research in this way to offer a microperspective on Wuthnow's otherwise macro theories of cultural change. The theoretical purchase in doing so is to explore the possibility of reversing Wuthnow's causal scheme. One reading of Wuthnow suggests that keywords catalyze a proliferation of local meanings that then cede primacy to one or more global frames. Is it possible, we wonder, for global meanings to coexist with local ones, with neither standardization nor univocality as the outcome?

To answer this question, we track over time the term *business model*, a keyword that increased dramatically in use and whose meanings became contested during a period of cultural change precipitated by the Digital Economy era of the 1990s. We argue that global and local meanings of keywords can persist among communities of discourse, and we explore empirically the configuration and resolution of this "global-local tension." Keywords, particularly the global-local tension of meanings they juggle, may point to an often-overlooked theoretical mechanism for establishing provisional cultural coherence.

We organize the remainder of this paper in four sections. We first review theoretical approaches to the study of keywords and cultural change. We then develop and discuss the empirical context of the study by considering practitioner, strategy, and management literatures on business models and the Digital Economy. We use the keyword *business model* as a case to explore more generally the relationship between keywords and cultural change, paying particular attention to the creation and stabilization of the global-local tension. Next, we report on the research design and data used in the study. Finally, we present the results of our research, developing these findings in light of our arguments about the global-local tension. We contribute to theories of cultural change and coherence, though this research is also deeply concerned with empirical illustration.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Cultural and organizational sociologists have examined the relationship between keywords and cultural change in many ways. Cultural sociologists largely inquire into the production of ideologies and symbols within a collectively shared space such as a social setting, environment, institutional context, or discursive field (Becker, 1982; Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1992a, 1992b; Fine, 1979; Hirsch, 1986; Katzenstein, 1995; Lamont and Molnar, 2002; Lamont and Wuthnow, 1990; Mohr, 1998; Mohr and Lee, 2000; Peterson and Anand, 2004; Spillman, 1995; Wuthnow, 1987, 1989; Wuthnow and Witten, 1988). Organizational theorists, on the other hand, are more concerned with how social actors organize their everyday activities amid institutional and structural constraints (Abrahamson, 1997; Abrahamson and Fombrun, 1992; Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999; Barley and Kunda, 1992; Creed *et al.*, 2002; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Guillén, 1994; Hoffman, 2001; Mohr and Duquenne, 1997; Powell and DiMaggio, 1991; Shenhav, 1999; Star, 1989; Star and Griesemer, 1989). These two literatures share theoretical concerns about the relationship between meaning

and action, culture and structure. We use them to consider the relationship between keywords and cultural change.

Studies of how keywords and their meanings change over time must address the variable nature of social life. Swidler (1986, 2001b), following Weber, focuses much of her research on how culture affects meaning and action over changing contexts. She argues that there are moments when the visibility and influence of culture are augmented. We build on insights from Swidler and others in this tradition about how culture matters (e.g., Rochon, 1998; Schudson, 1989; Sewell, 1999) to develop our own argument that during "unsettled times," cultural artifacts such as keywords have a greater capacity to recast systems of meaning.

We launch our arguments from Swidler's theory of cultural change. Swidler (1986, 2001b) argues that variations in institutional arrangements—conceptualized as settled and unsettled times—affect culture's influence on action. During settled times, diverse ideologies orient life's varied circumstances. Because life proceeds in fairly uncomplicated ways, individuals draw on contradictory ideologies, many of which are "nearly invisible" (Swidler, 2001b:103), having "gone underground, so pervading ordinary experiences as to blend imperceptibly into common-sense assumptions about what is true" (Swidler, 1986:281). During unsettled times, in contrast, individuals orient themselves to explicit and coherent ideologies. The goal is "to offer not multiple answers, but one unified answer to the question of how human beings should live" (279). In unsettled times, there are fewer ideologies.

With regards to unsettled periods, Swidler remains mostly silent on what happens to the rich diversity of local knowledge (see Geertz, 1983) that was in place during settled times. When times go from settled to unsettled, are local voices hushed in the face of a dominant, orienting ideology? How does this happen? Do local ideologies go underground? Does the dominant ideology erase local variants, so that local communities must reinvent them when times once again become settled? Or do local versions simply persist? And if they persist, how do we reconcile the global ideology with the local alternatives, that is, how do we resolve the global-local tension?

To investigate this, we inquire critically into the features of unsettled times. These, Swidler (1986) tells us, are "periods of social transformation" (278) that comprise "a contested cultural arena" (279) where there is "active competition with other cultural frameworks" (280) regarding how to organize action. Unsettled times are characterized by increased competition with other perspectives where "established cultural ends are jettisoned with apparent ease" (278, 282). In other words, unsettled periods are

those "when competing ways of organizing are developing or contending for dominance" (279).

Swidler does not take issue with keywords directly.[4] Her arguments focus on debates about how culture matters and the institutional conditions for when and how culture matters. But there is still some confusion here. In her later work, Swidler (2001b) adds that "there appears to be 'more' culture during unsettled periods" (89). More culture, but fewer, albeit explicit, ideologies. Although she does usefully distinguish the two, the relationship between keywords and cultural change is obscured. Because culture is diverse and sometimes conflicting, we surmise that when there is "more culture" (during unsettled times), keywords will also proliferate in usages and meanings. Diverse ideologies *decrease* during unsettled times, says Swidler, but keyword meanings, we argue, *increase*. We hypothesize that during unsettled times of cultural change, the process of "establish[ing] new styles and strategies of action" (Swidler, 1986:278) will be evident in variation in keyword use, itself an indicator of conflict over meaning. This is consistent with scholars who suggest that unsettled periods serve as a "precipitant by which alternative codes are mobilized" (Johnston and Klandermans, 1995:5).

We inquire into how global and local meanings of keywords relate during an unsettled period. Our strategy brings research from cultural sociology into dialogue with companion theories of organizations and institutions in order to conceptualize unsettled times more precisely. Friedland and Alford (1991), for example, argue that society comprises dynamic, often contested fields of meaning and action, in contrast to a more settled, integrative view of society. With this in mind, we specify "unsettled times" as moments when incumbent institutional arrangements are in transition and contested in public talk. During such times, groups of social actors compete for scarce organizational and cultural resources. In these historical moments, individuals and groups find themselves "searching the skies," and as they do this, "a demand for meaning may become . . . important" (Schudson, 1989:174). From Swidler and Schudson, we hypothesize a proliferation of keyword usages by different social actors.

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[4]She notes that "all real cultures contain diverse, often conflicting symbols, rituals, stories, and guides to action." As cultural artifacts, texts—academic or otherwise—are susceptible to this problem of cultural dissensus or diversity. The problem is exacerbated when multiple frameworks embodied within distinct texts are linked, as we do here in bringing Swidler into dialogue with Wuthnow and Williams. Mindful of the problem of diversity, we do not suggest that our interpretation of Swidler is *the* only correct reading. On the contrary, cultural power (see Griswold, 1987a) is evident in Swidler's work precisely because it can produce multiple interpretations. Diversity is a source of strength rather than disintegration (1986: 277).

The Global-Local Tension

Research in cultural sociology recognizes and develops aspects of our global-local tension. Wendy Griswold (1987b), for example, argues that "genres" are classification devices that conciliate stylistic similarities and differences. A genre is an abstraction of common elements (i.e., a global understanding) that also allows for idiosyncratic variations and readings (i.e., local interpretations).

"Cultural power" is another concept that sociologists use to deal with our global-local tension. Griswold (1987a) investigates how meaning is fabricated from a West Indian novel read in several different countries, arguing for a theory of cultural power, according to which readers will favor works that are seen as simultaneously coherent and multivocal. We read Griswold as suggesting that cultural power depends partly on the ability to elicit relative consensus of meaning while sustaining a divergence of more specific interpretations. The analytic tension between cultural coherence/consensus and multivocality/divergence mirrors our concern with global and local, respectively. No empirical mechanism in cultural sociology yet demonstrates explicitly how to conciliate the global-local tension.

In addition to approaches within cultural sociology, research in related fields has also explored forms of what we present as the global-local tension. Some version of this recurs in interdisciplinary research on the interplay between unity and diversity in organizing a March on Washington (Ghaziani, 2005), on the diffusion of innovations (Wejnert, 2002), in cognitive anthropology on the organization of diversity (Wallace, 1961), in scientific studies on boundary objects that serve as a unified site where heterogeneous social actors meet (Star, 1989; Star and Griesemer, 1989), in writings on institutional logics and the politics of culture (Friedland and Alford, 1991), writings on "theorization" in organizational institutionalism that examine patterned relationships among categories of discourse deployed by different social actors (Strang and Meyer, 1994:104; Greenwood *et al.*, 2002), writings on "editing rules" whereby ideas get translated with different content across different contexts in a process that emphasizes similarities and suppresses differences (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996:70; 2002; Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall, 2002), in the work of "institutional entrepreneurs," or actors who facilitate cooperation across diverse groups of people by providing "common meanings and identities" (Fligstein, 1997:398), and in organizational research on "legitimating accounts," or "local recitations of broadly available cultural accounts" (Creed *et al.*, 2002:477; Meyer *et al.*, 1994). These issues are on the agendas of scholars in several research traditions. Our goal here is modest: to study the

global-local tension in an empirically robust and replicable way that can allow us to propose a theoretical mechanism that drives and ultimately conciliates the tension.

We use Swidler (1986; 2001b), Williams (1976), and Wuthnow (1989) to motivate our inquiry into how the global-local tension is conciliated. Wuthnow's primary concern was whether ideas drive change or whether history has an autonomous driving force. According to Wuthnow, local bundles of discourse "draw resources, insights, and inspiration from the environment: they reflect it, speak to it, and make themselves relevant to it. And yet they also remain autonomous enough from their social environment to acquire a broader, even universal and timeless appeal" (3). This "problem of articulation" loosely suggests an analytic sequence in which local ideas eventually translate into more global precepts.[5]

Wuthnow takes issue with how cultural products articulate with the social environment in which they are produced (Wuthnow, 1989:3). We argue that Wuthnow's "problem of articulation," while admittedly concerned on a macrolevel with how broad ideological shifts are causally related to material and organizational changes at the societal level, nonetheless contains tools for the investigation of a closely related, albeit micro-level problem concerned with changes in keyword meanings. We use Wuthnow to study linguistic innovations and the global-local tension. In doing so, we develop an alternate and arguably reverse hypothesis: global, or societal-level changes may produce a plurality of local meanings, with neither co-opting the other. Available theories of cultural change suggest Wuthnow's finding is one among many possible patterns. Five general patterns have been uncovered across subfields: (1) local meanings become universalized (e.g., Wuthnow, 1989, and much cultural anthropology); (2) the global drives out the local discourse and becomes standardized (e.g., institutional theory, especially research on institutional logics); (3) global-local hybrids are created (e.g., structuralism, semiotic theory, and postmodernism); (4) global pressures prompt the formation of local niches and segments (e.g., evolutionary theory); or (5) global and local coexist (our alternate hypothesis). To test these possibilities, we track changes in meaning associated with a contemporary economic keyword.

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[5]We recognize that Wuthnow presents a more subtle and complex argument about the ways that economic growth, cultural change, and institutional structures mutually accommodate, articulate with, and adapt to one another. We purposefully reduce this argument to a loose, local-to-global sequence to highlight one position on how keywords recast meaning during times of cultural change.

Business Model as a Keyword

Scholars typically conceptualize periods of economic change by innovations in technology and changes in industries and markets (Schumpeter, 1942; Utterback, 1996). This can involve the modification of old technologies (e.g., the advent of the microcomputer) and/or the introduction of new technologies (e.g., the Internet and the World Wide Web; see Kotha, 1998; Suarez, 2004). Technological innovation propels cultural change by disrupting the conduct of everyday activity, forcing a reassessment of what is possible (Abrahamson and Fombrun, 1994; Barley, 1986; Ferraro *et al.*, 2005; Guillén, 1994; Porac *et al.*, 1995; Sahlin-Andersson, 2002; Spender, 1989).

The mid-1990s marked a period of cultural change called the "Digital Economy" (Feng *et al.*, 2001), an era of "eventful history" (Sewell, 1999) delimited by the above empirical indicators. The broad claims in this period were that the Internet and the World Wide Web had rewritten the basic rules of the economy and hence made possible novel strategies for commerce (Kotha, 1998). Not surprisingly, the emergence and impact of the Digital Economy are much contested (Henwood, 2003; Zackarakis *et al.*, 2003). We treat this fact as a marker for an unsettled time of cultural change, providing one motivation for the design of our research.

Business model is a keyword that acquired prominence in the lexicon of the Digital Economy. Chesbrough and Rosenbloom (2002) argue that the term is much used but seldom defined explicitly, a sentiment that filters into practitioner worlds as well: "The term business model . . . itself is new . . . and it is not yet clearly defined, so some people misunderstand it" (Focus Japan, 2000). *Business model* is rich with connotation for practitioners such as entrepreneurs, technologists, lawyers, and venture capitalists, though it is often contested by researchers (Chesbrough and Rosenbloom, 2002; Feng *et al.*, 2001; Ventresca *et al.*, 2001).

At least three reasons contribute to contestation over this term. First, public talk about business models commences in the early 1970s, as we show below. Second, the term draws from a variety of academic and functional disciplines, though none has effectively claimed exclusive jurisdiction over its meaning. Communities use the term *business model* with different meanings, as if, recalling Williams (1976), people are "speaking a different language." A third reason why the term is so contested is that historical and contemporary contexts of use are marked by considerable ambiguity.

Research and practitioner communities focus on different aspects of business models (Chesbrough and Rosenbloom, 2002). Prominent among these are value-chain configuration (e.g., Amit and Zott, 2001;

Timmers, 1998), innovation (e.g., Patel, 1999), generation of revenues (e.g., Emigh, 1999; Green, 1999), resources and capabilities (e.g., Barney, 1991), networks (e.g., Byrnes and Judge, 1999; Evans and Wurster, 1999; Mayo and Brown, 1999), and transaction costs (e.g., Dyer, 1997). Each of these represents a local, subcultural interpretation of the global category of *business model.*

Debates over the "correct" conception of a business model dramatically increased in the 1990s. Clint (1998:55), in a *Forbes* magazine article abstract, highlights one modern usage:

> Amazon's rise to some extent reflects elements of its business model. For starters, the firm got to its market first. The Amazon site also exploits the Net's potential to build what analysts call a community around a product. Amazon's ability to maintain records of customer preferences and then act on that information gives it yet another advantage as an online retailer. Finally, it helps that books are quasi commodities—there is no need to try them on before you buy—and that they are small-ticket, impulse items that are easy to ship . . . . Amazon's greatest contribution to Internet commerce may be that it has alerted consumers to some of the pleasures of online shopping."

The case of Amazon illustrates the complexity of the keyword (Kotha, 1998). In the Forbes extract, a business model includes ideas related to time-to-market, transaction content (i.e., the advantages of selling books and the ability to maintain customer preferences and then act on that information), transaction structure (seen in the description of community development), revenue model (i.e., the feasibility of generating profit), and value creation (i.e., descriptions of the success of Internet retailing in alerting consumers to the pleasures of online shopping). In addition, there are attributions of business strategy and competitive success, along with the ability to capture and sustain value amid changing economic conditions.

Particularly during unsettled times, we argue that keywords like *business model* refract cultural paradigms and thus provide opportunities to track changes in ideologies and belief systems (see Lieberson, 2000, and Spillman, 1997 for similar approaches). We do not take issue with competing definitions. We view the persistence of plural meanings as an empirical opportunity to study the relationship between keywords and cultural change. Because diverse groups of social actors use keywords, they have the potential to trigger a variety of interpretations. At the same time, there is a struggle across social groups to establish a common, global usage. What becomes of this global-local tension?

We study the global-local tension by tracking how *business model* spreads within and across communities of discourse over time (see Abrahamson, 1997; Barley and Kunda, 1992; Hirsch, 1986). How do different communities of discourse use the term? Do some usages become

more prominent in different time periods? How do local meanings interact with currents to establish a global meaning? In empirical terms, we ask, How is it that economists, strategists, marketers, and those in information technology, among others, can each use *business model* in locally tailored ways while also speaking to each other as part of the larger management community?

RESEARCH DESIGN, DATA AND METHODS

Research in the sociology of culture has focused descriptively on elaborating specific cultural forms, practices, or institutions. The move to generalize social processes, to develop theoretical mechanisms that are empirically verifiable, is on the agenda (Williams, 1981). The primary task of cultural analysis should be "to identify recurring features, distinctions, and underlying patterns which give form and substance to culture" (Wuthnow *et al.*, 1984:255; see also Ghaziani, 2004). Meaning—or the sense people make of the world or some aspect of it—is established from the relationship among these patterns (e.g., Alexander, 1990; Barthes, 1964; Benedict, 1934; Bourdieu, 1984; Kane, 1997; Lévi-Strauss, 1963; Sahlins, 1976). Given this, we turn to data for how keyword meanings spread over time and across communities. We elaborate a replicable approach for understanding cultural change in one arena of organizational discourse. In doing so, we show one way to bring formalist analysis to the problem of meaning (Griswold, 1992; Mohr, 1998; Wuthnow, 1987).

Our data come from ABI Inform, a full-text database that houses management articles. We treat these articles as "public talk" that can be empirically coded and analyzed (see Abrahamson, 1991, 1997; Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999; Barley and Kunda, 1992; Shenhav, 1999). The term *business model* appears in this database for the first time in 1975. We, therefore, collected data from articles published in the period 1975–2000. Our search yielded a total of 1,729 article abstracts over the entire 26-year observation period that contained either the phrase "business model" or "business models."

We included all abstracts for the period 1975–1994 in our data coding and analysis ($N = 166$). For the period 1995–2000 ($N = 1,563$), we randomly sampled 20% of the articles for coding and analysis ($N = 313$). The phrase "Digital Economy" first appears in ABI Inform in 1995. There is a substantial increase in articles per year that use the keyword *business model* after 1995. We sample articles for coding from this point. The random sampling strategy resulted in too few samples of some journal categories for meaningful analysis. To address this, we purposively sampled 28

abstracts from these journal categories. The final sample contained 507 abstracts: the complete set of 166 abstracts from the period 1975 to 1994 and the 341 randomly sampled from 1995 to 2000.

Dependent Variable: Business Model Frames

We use frame analysis for systematic evidence on the keyword *business model*.[6] Frames are "underlying structures or organizing principles that bind and give coherence to diverse arrays of symbols and idea elements that make up . . . packages of meaning" (Creed *et al.*, 2002:481). Frames manifest in the presence or absence of concepts and phrases in the context of use (Entman, 1991; Gamson, 1992). As Gamson (1992) explains, "[L]ike a picture frame, a frame directs our attention to what is relevant; . . . like the frame of a house, it is an . . . infrastructure that holds together different rooms and gives shape to the edifices of meaning" (quoted in Creed *et al.*, 2002:481).

Frame analysis is useful for studying the global-local tension in a discursive context for at least two reasons. First, frame analysis directs attention to the organization of "cultural building blocks" (Creed *et al.*, 2002:479) that can provide clues for how to stabilize the global-local tension. Frame analysis also helps to "diagnose and evaluate" (Gamson, 1992) discursive complexity by "persistent selection, emphasis, and exclusion" (Gitlin, 1980:7) of these cultural building blocks that highlight how keywords take on various meanings. It is an effective methodological strategy to "locate, perceive, identify, and label" (Goffman, 1974:21) the flow of information, paying special attention to connections between the meanings of a keyword and the diverse communities of discourse that use them. Creed *et al.* (2002:480–81) contend that "framing defines the social arena, including the players and their interests, [and] how players and interests are related." Consistent with Wuthnow, we focus on struggles over the organization of these frames by different communities of discourse.

Following work in social movement and communication studies (c.f., Creed *et al.*, 2002; Entman, 1991; Gamson, 1992; Gamson and Lasch, 1983; Miller, 1997), we detected frames by asking two questions after reading each article abstract: (1) What core concept(s) unify the central ideas in the abstract? (2) How do the concept(s) motivate meaning and/or application of the keyword *business model*? Core concepts were

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[6]Goffman's (1974) original usage of frame analysis has been modified and extended by generations of social movement, communication, and organization scholars (Babb, 1996; Creed *et al.*, 2002; Entman, 1991, 1993; Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Gitlin, 1980; Snow and Benford, 1988; Snow *et al.*, 1986; Williams and Benford, 1996). Although this process has involved controversy, we follow the current conventions in the literature.

extracted on the basis of theoretical fidelity and resulted in a series of "idea elements," in the parlance of frame analysis, which were then collapsed into "frames." The frame we call "Value Creation" for example includes the idea elements of transaction content, governance, and structure, among others (see Amit and Zott, 2001; Chesbrough and Rosenbloom, 2002).

In the coding process, the goal is to rely on the actual language found in article abstracts. For cultural analysis, Griswold (1987a) contends that coding categories should derive from the original texts themselves, "rather than being superimposed by the analyst" (1096). We followed this methodological counsel. Where the abstract said "the firm's business model specified means for value creation," for example, we coded "Value Creation," which is also consistent with terms used in the academic literature on Value Chain Analysis.

Where a given abstract contained multiple, disparate idea elements, we used the sentence containing the keyword *business model* as our unit of analysis. We encountered some abstracts that did not specify what was meant by the term. We coded these cases as evidence of an assumed common knowledge where there was a standard (i.e., global) meaning without need of technical or specialty (i.e., local) elaboration. We anchor this decision in a methodological tradition that views assumed, unspecified, or "missing" data as themselves providing a unique type of data (Lewis and Lewis, 1980; Stinchcombe, 1964). We treat the absence of an explicit definition of *business model* as a datum, that is, as a proxy for the assumption of tacit, commonly agreed upon meaning. We report these cases as the "Tacit Conception" frame.

We use a "retroductive" coding scheme (Ragin, 1994) that alternates between a priori and inductive codings. When using retroductive coding, the categories are mostly established prior to the analysis, based on relevant theoretical frameworks. This type of coding improves reliability (Stemler, 2001). Wuthnow and others emphasize that cultural analysis must pay attention to the relational aspect of how discourse is structured. Analysts must consider how keywords and their disaggregated meanings are organized in relationship to one another. Some scholars conceptualize this relational aspect through "discursive fields" (Bourdieu, 1992a; Spillman, 1995). We heed their counsel by tracking how different discourse communities use the keyword *business model* over time.

Table I presents the eleven frames for the keyword *business model* from our empirical coding along with a roster of idea elements, referent theory literatures, and examples. By extracting multiple frames over a period of 25 years for one keyword, we remain sensitive to and correct a criticism of frame analysis as ignoring the possibility for one concept to have

Table I. Business Model Frames and Coding Procedure

Frame	Idea elements	Theory referent	Examples from coded abstracts
Business plan	Broad-based specifications of how to do business Abstractions of what constitutes a business	General theories of management and organizations	"Doing business the old way does not cut it any longer in a world where . . . new business models are changing the face of the insurance industry" (*National Underwriter*, 2000). "Last August, two Web-based companies unveiled . . . their business models. Claiming that they had created fundamentally new ways of doing business, priceline.com and CyberGold Inc. attempted to cordon off their market niches" (*Inc.*, 1998).
Business strategy	Strategy, economics, efficiencies, markets Position, segment specificity, standards, penetration, time-to-market	Theories of strategic management and entrepreneurship	"A business model is proposed followed by its application to strategic planning. Applying a simplified version of [it] to the problem of strategic management provides an organic structure that gives coherence to an enterprise" (*International Journal of Management*, 1994). "Fore more than 20 years, the U.S. business community has been fascinated with the success of the Japanese business model. . . . In technology-based industries, time-to-market is the key success factor" (*Plant Engineering*, 1995).
Computer/ systems modeling	Computer-assisted modeling of business practices Computerized business environment Computer software	Operations research/ information systems	"The business environment is sure to become increasingly complex in the future. The potential value of computerized business models will therefore also increase. . . . As successful applications become widespread and as managers gain more knowledge in modeling techniques, computerized models should become an indispensable aid in many business functions" (*Journal of Systems Management*, 1975). "The [software] package . . . programs allow the development and use of customized planning and analysis tools. Even without computer programming knowledge, the user builds relatively sophisticated business models. . . . This software is an important tool" (*Small Business Computers Magazine*, 1982).

Table I. Continued

Frame	Idea elements	Theory referent	Examples from coded abstracts
Electronic commerce	E-commerce/Digital Economy issues	Innovation and technology management	"Major computer companies will steer from their traditional business models in an effort to exploit the Internet and kickstart new markets, such as electronic commerce" (*Computer Reseller News*, 1997).
	Business platform (B2B, B2C; clicks-and-mortars)		"In recent months, the flow of consumer goods toward B2B has turned from a trickle to a fire hose. . . . Clearly, one big reason for the switch is that some of those business models never worked" (*Business Week*, 2000).
Globalization	International businesses and practices	International business theory	"Today's interdependent global economy demands a new business model" (*CIO Conference Supplement*, 1993). "None of the previous business models seems predictive of professional employment in the emerging global economy" (*Technology Review*, 1993).
Organization design	Organizational/company/ industry structure	Organization theory	"Intelligent Electronics, Inc. plans to overhaul its internal business model to provide an infrastructure that will support the reseller's efforts to top $ 10 billion in sales within the next decade. The company will consolidate all of its separate business units back into the company with one unified sales force" (*Computer Reseller News*, 1994).
	Intra-firm organization		"These forces dictate a need for new business models, and organizations need to restructure" (*World*, 1988).
Relationship management	Types of relationships	Human resource management	"This focus on the customer will be the driving force shaping their business model" (*Telecommunications*, 1998).
	Customer satisfaction		"The goal of the build-to-order business model that was pioneered by Dell Computer and embraced by many other PC companies is simple: Give the customer the product he wants when he wants it" (*Purchasing*, 1998).
	Build-to-order (BTO)		

Table I. Continued

Frame	Idea elements	Theory referent	Examples from coded abstracts
Revenue model	Generating revenues and profits.	Economics; resource-based view of the firm	"The business model provides the necessary tools for the different departments to evaluate their profitability" (*Industrial Management & Data Systems*, 1991). "Data warehouses are becoming crucial as the health care industry moves . . . to [a business model] focused on controlling costs" (*Informationweek*, 1997).
Tacit conception	Assumed definition	Inductive	"As new entrants with new business models pour into the . . . [market] space, it is increasingly difficult to make sense of the landscape" (*Harvard Business Review*, 2000). "The growing technology sector is challenging traditional business models and implementing new ways of thinking" (*Commercial Investment Real Estate Journal*, 2000).
Value creation	Creating value; Transaction content, governance, structure	Value chain analysis	"The key to reconfiguring business models for the knowledge economy lies in understanding the new currencies of value" (*Journal of Business Strategy*, 2000). "What is unique about AvantGo's approach is the business model is based around the idea of creating value" (*Advertising Age*, 2000).
Varied Other	Other topical themes	Inductive	"[M]anaging and fulfilling inventory is no longer the center of the wheel when it comes to . . . business models" (*Computer Reseller News*, 1996). "Clinging to tradition, businessmen, and some women, ignored the differences between the sexes, assuming that women would willfully adopt male business models" (*Successful Meetings*, 1989).

Note: Frames are listed alphabetically.

multiple meanings (Gottdiener, 1995:19–22; Steinberg, 1999:740). In using a retroductive coding strategy, some of our coding was informed by pre-existing theoretical accounts in the management literature. In such cases, the meaning of a respective frame is clarified by its connection to an identi-fied branch of research, which helps us to interpret the trends presented in the results section. Where we primarily used an a priori coding scheme, we use the label "Inductive." This information is identified under the column headed "Theory Referent." The final column of Table I presents exemplary instances of each frame in order to illustrate the methodological principle in cultural sociology which asserts that categories used for coding should de-rive from the original texts themselves. For illustrative purposes, we identify the sentence containing the keyword *business model*. Note, however, that the entire abstract served as the codable unit of analysis. Placement is a joint product of the presence of key idea elements read within the idiom of a particular theory referent.

Independent Variables

Consistent with our theoretical framework, we measure two kinds of independent variables: those that distinguish among the journal communi-ties and those representing the historical periods that map onto the rise and development of the Digital Economy.

Communities of Discourse

We coded how different journals use the keyword *business model* to ex-amine variation within and across communities of discourse. Abbott (1988) argues that professional communities engage in jurisdictional struggles to establish, defend, and challenge the social space of expertise and control. We build on the central findings of Abbott and others to build the case for using journals as a first-order proxy to identify Wuthnow's communi-ties of discourse. Raub and Rüling (2001:123), in their study of rhetorical struggles in the development of knowledge management, argue that "dif-ferent communities become rivals for the power to define what constitutes a legitimate . . . discourse and for access to scarce societal and organizational resources that are typically associated with it." The journals that publish the articles we coded are venues for this sort of professional struggle, pub-lishing texts that participate in debates over meanings within and across professional communities (Latour, 1987). In this regard, different commu-nities of discourse compete for limited organizational resources associated

with defining a common keyword—*business model*—by imposing alternative meanings. Cultural change is chronicled or "mapped" by examining changes in keyword meanings over time (Rochon, 1998).

Coding the journals into "communities" allows us to create a measure to distinguish how various management communities publicly "talk" about a business model over time. The data include the journal venue for each instance of keyword usage. We coded these into ten management communities based on Ulrich's standard industry categorization scheme: Banking, Finance, and Accounting; Business and Management; Communications; Computers and Computing; Information and Technology; Investments and Insurance; Manufacturing and Engineering; Marketing, Advertising, and Purchasing; Strategy and Economics; and Other.

There are, of course, limitations in using the journals to create proxies for the "challenger" social actors that Wuthnow emphasizes, and we rely on these only for main effects. Not all publications within any one journal community will represent key actors in that particular community of discourse. We have no way to distinguish multi-authored articles that would include colleagues from across journal communities. There are other concerns. Raub and Rüling (2001) used a similar procedure and investigated the validity of such coding procedures. They found "a clear [statistical] relationship between . . . affiliation and . . . content and that articles in IT journals talk about IT issues and articles in management journals talk about management issues" (120). These are more like knowledge communities (i.e., people who publish in common journals) than discrete social actors.

Historical Time Periods

Following Swidler, Williams, and Wuthnow, we contend that communities of discourse struggle over defining keywords and that the intensity of this struggle is likely to vary depending on settled or unsettled conditions. We created period dummy variables for 5-year intervals from 1975 to 2000 to view trends over time in the distribution of use (content frames) and among communities of discourse (journal communities). Our research design takes advantage of a natural experiment. We chronicle several settled time periods with no basic shifts in core economic and cultural conditions. These settled times are followed by a period of ferment and debate. The mid-1990s marked the start of that novel set of cultural-change efforts often called the "Digital Economy" (Feng *et al.*, 2001). While we report descriptive data on all periods, we focus on two consolidated periods, 1975–1994 and 1995–2000.
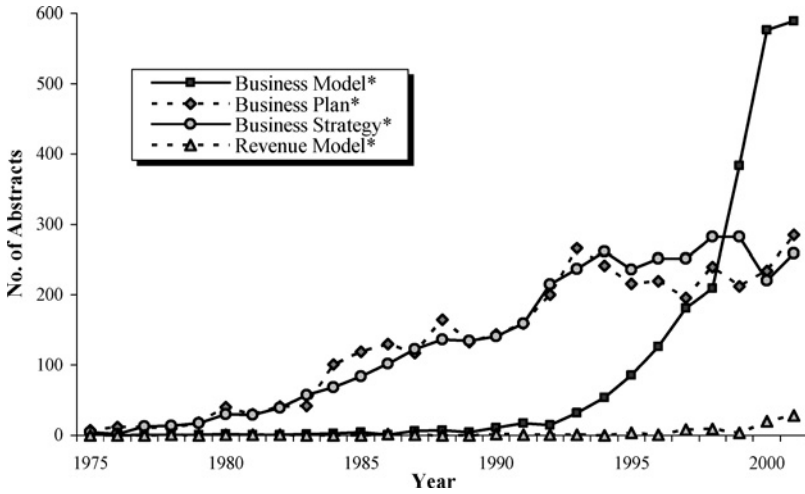
Fig. 1. Incidence of *business model* and related management terms, 1975–2000. *Note*: For each term, we included searches on stem words and variations (e.g., *business model* and *models*). Data for *business policy* and *management strategy* are not included. The trend for *business policy* parallels that for *business plan* and shows 22 mentions total. The trend for *management strategy* parallels that for *business strategy*, but also at more modest counts—130 mentions total.

RESULTS

Overall Trends in the Spread of Key Management Terms

Figure 1 reports frequencies of *business model* and related management terms in published academic and practitioner literatures from 1975 to 2000.[7]

Similar to the use of other popular management keywords (e.g., *business plan*, *revenue model*, and *business strategy*, also shown in Fig. 1), the use of *business model* remains stable for the first 15 years of observation. However, the incidence of *business model* increases dramatically after 1990 in both absolute and relative shares. Two other trends from Fig. 1 are noteworthy. One is that the use of other management and strategy keywords begins to increase in the mid-1980s and then gradually rises, though never

[7]The total number of articles indexed by ABI Inform may have increased over the observation periods. In order to account for this, we use the standard corrections employed by Abrahamson (1997) and Abrahamson and Fairchild (1999). That is, we divided the number of articles in any one year by the total number of articles available in ABI Inform for that particular year. Reanalyzing the data with this adjustment technique resulted in the same relative changes over time for the various terms.

spiking as dramatically as the use of *business model*. Some keywords, like *revenue model*, show little usage even into the end of the observation period. The second trend is the historical shift from 1995 to 2000 in the relative use of terms. By 1999, incidence of *business model* dominates all others. We explore this in detail below when we report on the distribution of frames. Figure 1 highlights overall time trends that describe *business model* as a pervasive keyword, the increases relative to competing keywords, and the sustained persistence over time of the other keywords.

Cultural Change and the Spread of Social Actors and Ideas

Scholars argue that cultural change is marked by increases in social actors and ideas. Table II presents empirical evidence of these two indicators of cultural change.

Table II shows in 5-year time blocks when each of the 10 journal categories first reports use of the keyword *business model* and when the 11 frames first appear. In the earliest period, three unique journal communities use the term, then three more in the next period, then three more, so that nine of the ten journal communities use the keyword in whatever capacity by 1990. The pattern among frames is different. Two of the frames, Computer/Systems Modeling and Organization Design, appear in the first period, 1975–1979. No unique frames appear in the second period. Three more frames appear in the third period, revealing that five of the eleven are available before 1990. In the 1990–1994 period, the six remaining frames all enter. This suggests that actors and ideas spread at different rates within the same observation period. Unique actors spread more quickly than do unique ideas, indicating that contestation over use is lagged after an increasing number of unique players begin using the keyword. We now turn to a more nuanced consideration of this pattern.

Table II. Communities and Frames, 1975–2000

Year	Communities	Frames
1975–1979	3	2
1980–1984	3	0
1985–1989	3	3
1990–1994	1	6
1995–2000	0	0
Total N	10	11

Distribution of Business Model Frames

Table III reports frequencies for how different business model frames spread over time. We have consolidated the 25-year observation period into three periods to make presentation more accessible. Recall that we sampled about 500 of 1,500 abstracts from 1995 to 2000 period. The marginals for the table should be interpreted with this in mind. About 7.5% of all use occurred before 1990. Another 25% of use occurred during 1990–1994. Of the cases we coded for analysis, Value Creation, Tacit Conception, Revenue Model, Electronic Commerce, and Computer/Systems Modeling appear to be the top five dominant frames, accounting for nearly three-quarters of all public talk over the 25-year observation period. With the exception of Computer/Systems Modeling, these frames all increase sharply in their use of the keyword after the phrase "Digital Economy" enters the managerial repertoire. Computer/Systems Modeling is part of the top five due to its strong early presence.

Nearly 70% of public talk concerning business models occurs after 1995, suggesting an association between cultural change and increased public talk about keywords. Table III also indicates that 25% of such talk occurred before 1995, and 8% occurred before 1990, contradicting the plausible argument that business model public talk is simply an artifact of the Digital Economy era. The table further highlights that the first five frames account for nearly 75% of all talk. Another instructive lesson of

Table III. Frame Frequencies by Time Period, 1975–2000

Frame	1975–1989	1990–1994	1995–2000	Raw totals	Percentage of total public talk
Value creation	1 (0.0)	7 (5.5)	81 (23.8)	89	17.6
Tacit conception	4 (0.1)	25 (19.5)	55 (16.1)	84	16.6
Revenue model	0	13 (10.2)	58 (17.0)	71	14.0
Electronic commerce	0	7 (5.5)	57 (16.7)	64	12.6
Computer/systems modeling	28 (0.7)	19 (14.8)	13 (3.8)	60	11.8
Relationship management	0	17 (13.3)	35 (10.3)	52	10.3
Business strategy	0	11 (8.6)	14 (4.1)	25	4.9
Varied other	3 (0.1)	12 (9.4)	5 (1.5)	20	3.9
Business plan	2 (0.1)	3 (2.3)	13 (3.8)	18	3.6
Organization design	0	5 (3.9)	9 (2.6)	14	2.8
Globalization	0	9 (7.0)	1 (0.3)	10	2.0
Time block totals	38	128	341	507	100
Percentage of total public talk	8	25	67	100	–

$N = 507$. (): Counts as percentage of total public talk within respective time block.

Table III is that early business model frames, such as Computer/Systems Modeling, persist in later time periods. They are not supplanted by, co-opted by, or incorporated under later-arriving frames, despite changing frequencies.

Global Trends

In reporting frame frequencies by time period, Table III also provides evidence of global trends in business model public talk. The table indicates that the Computer/Systems Modeling frame occupies the greatest proportion of public talk in the first time block and a large proportion in the second time block. Of the 11 frames, this one accounts for slightly less than a third of all public talk from 1975 to 1994. It is the dominant frame from 1975 to 1989, occupying 70% of all business model public talk. This dominance is evidence of its status as global frame in the respective time period and can be read in the sense of Wuthnow and Abbott as reflecting the struggle of a particular professional subgroup seeking to impose its own global meaning (e.g., the use of formal, mathematical techniques).

The global texture changes during the 1990–1994 time period. Although the Computer/Systems Modeling frame is still widely used in that period, activity is much more heterogeneous than in the period immediately prior. We recognize 1990–1994 as an "unsettled time," in the Swidler idiom, in which competing visions of the global rules of the game were shifting and contested (Kotha, 1998; Zackarakis *et al.*, 2003).

Also of interest in the 1990–1994 time period is the presence of the Tacit Conception frame. In the nearly 20% of usage in such cases, the reader is assumed to know what *business model* means. This indicates the increasingly taken-for-granted nature of *business model*, which further suggests movement toward a global standard, even if that is assumed.

The heterogeneity of activity during the 1990–1994 time period becomes structured in the last time period (1995–2000). Here, Computer/Systems Modeling as a frame shows a 74% decrease in overall use. In its place, the Value Creation frame more than triples from the period prior. This finding is consistent with practitioner viewpoints that the main emphasis of a business model is how to create value in the Digital Economy. We see these shifts as indicating that the conception of one group of actors is in potential tension with that of other professional groups. We therefore take these shifts as evidence of changes in the global meanings of business model public talk. In other words, communities of discourse that engage in business model public talk do so, in nearly a quarter of all instances, by referring to its value creation aspect.

Notice that although Value Creation is the most prominent frame, its dominance does not equal that of Computer/Systems Modeling in the earlier time period. More than 80% of all public talk in the last time period is distributed across a cluster of five frames: Value Creation, Revenue Model, Electronic Commerce, Tacit Conception, and Relationship Management. It is instructive that no single frame dominates, as did Computer/Systems Modeling in the earlier periods; instead, dominance is shared across a cluster of related frames. Although heterogeneous, we may interpret the different frames as embodying the same idea, namely, the question of how to create value in the face of a changing business environment. The different frames emphasize different aspects of the same problem. Generating revenues and managing relationships, although ostensibly different, both have something to say about the challenge of creating value in the unsettled Digital Economy. A global theme is evidenced by the distribution of talk across a cluster of frames that exhibit value creation as a common underlying emphasis.

The Global-Local Tension:
Time-Dependent Distribution of Public Talk

Evidence of tension between global and local frames is more forcefully established by considering the time-dependence of the distribution. We explore this in Table IV below.

Table IV. Frame Frequencies, Pre- and Post-Digital Economy

	Time period		
	Pre-Digital Economy (1975–1994)	Post-Digital Economy (1995–2000)	*N*
Business model content frame			
Value creation	6 (−3.6)**	78 (2.3)*	84
Tacit conception	28 (1.0)	54 (−0.6)	82
Revenue model	10 (−2.1)*	57 (1.3)	67
Electronic commerce	7 (−2.5)*	55 (1.6)	62
Computer/systems modeling	44 (6.9)**	13 (−4.4)**	57
Relationship management	13 (−0.1)	34 (0.1)	47
Business strategy	7 (0.4)	14 (−0.3)	21
Business plan	2 (−1.0)	12 (0.6)	14
Organization design	4 (0.2)	9 (−0.1)	13
Globalization	8 (3.4)**	1 (−2.1)*	9

Note. Standardized residual values in parentheses. Three cells have expected counts of less than 5 and this may result in a slightly inflated chi-square statistic. The low frame counts in certain periods are substantively meaningful information in considering the historical distribution of frames. $\chi^2 = 119.787$; 9 d.f.; $p < 0.001$; $N = 456$. *$p < 0.05$. **$p < 0.01$.

Table IV provides evidence that frame distribution is time-dependent. The chi-square of 119.8 shows a statistically reliable association between time period and overall business model talk ($p < 0.001$). Table IV also indicates a patterned distribution of global and local frames. The standardized residuals vividly capture the global-local tension. These residuals identify cells that exhibit a statistically significant distribution. For example, the Computers/Systems Modeling frame is statistically over-represented in the pre-Digital Economy years and under-represented in the post-Digital Economy years, lending further support to the evidence from Table III that this frame is the global frame prior to the 1990s. The reverse pattern holds true for other frames. For example, the Value Creation frame is statistically under-represented during the pre-Digital Economy years and over-represented during the post-Digital Economy years. The Value Creation frame is a global frame by the late 1990s. The frames that display a positive standardized residual value (e.g., Computer/Systems Modeling and Value Creation) are evidence of global frames that have primacy in use in a particular historical period. We interpret the case of cells that are not statistically significant as evidence of locally tailored frames. Note that these local frames persist in the face of other, more statistically global frames.

The Global-Local Tension:
Disaggregated Summary Trends of Public Talk

The global-local tension is also captured by disaggregating frames by journal communities. Table V provides data on the five most prominent communities of discourse.

Table V shows that the distribution of frames changes. Until 1989, Computer/Systems Modeling was the dominant frame and dominant expression of a particular subgroup. This frame occupied nearly 100% of all public talk across communities. The 1990–1994 period marks the beginning of an unsettled time, identified by a plurality of frames. By 1995, the Value Creation and Revenue Model frames are shared across communities as two of the most prominent frames. It is telling that the first four frames (Value Creation, Tacit Conception, Revenue Model, and Electronic Commerce) exhibit a relatively similar pattern of distribution across communities from 1995 to 2000. Between 70 and 90% of all business model public talk takes place within these four frames for all journal communities. Although these findings only display face validity, our conclusions are triangulated when considered in concert with data from Tables III and IV, which suggest this clustering of frames as the global presence.

Although a global trend emerges across the communities, Table V indicates that heterogeneity is maintained. This variation is locally tailored.

Table V. Frame Counts by Time Period and Community, 1975–2000

Communities, with frames	Period				
	1975–79	1980–84	1985–89	1990–94	1995–00
Computers and computing					
Value creation	0	0	0	7	26
Tacit conception	0	0	0	31	15
Revenue model	0	0	0	7	16
Electronic commerce	0	0	0	5	11
Computer/systems modeling	100	100	100	22	6
Relationship management	0	0	0	7	13
Business strategy	0	0	0	2	5
Business plan	0	0	0	2	3
Business and management					
Value creation	0	0	0	4	21
Tacit conception	0	0	0	13	21
Revenue model	0	0	0	4	14
Electronic commerce	0	0	0	4	20
Computer/systems modeling	50	100	100	8	1
Relationship management	0	0	0	29	8
Business strategy	0	0	0	13	3
Business plan	0	0	0	0	9
Information and technology					
Value creation	0	0	0	8	25
Tacit conception	0	0	0	23	15
Revenue model	0	0	0	8	11
Electronic commerce	0	0	0	8	21
Computer/systems modeling	0	100	100	31	8
Relationship management	0	0	0	0	10
Business strategy	0	0	0	7	4
Business plan	0	0	0	0	0
Marketing, advertising and purchasing					
Value creation	0	0	0	0	22
Tacit conception	0	0	50	18	13
Revenue model	0	0	0	19	28
Electronic commerce	0	0	0	9	11
Computer/systems modeling	0	100	0	9	0
Relationship management	0	0	0	9	15
Business strategy	0	0	0	9	7
Business plan	0	0	50	0	2
Banking, finance and accounting					
Value creation	0	0	0	0	4
Tacit conception	0	0	33	16	23
Revenue model	0	0	0	17	23
Electronic commerce	0	0	0	17	31
Computer/systems modeling	0	0	67	0	7
Relationship management	0	0	0	0	4
Business strategy	0	0	0	0	4
Business plan	0	0	0	0	4

Note. Data are listed for most prominent journal communities. We do not list the three least common frames, so column totals by community may not sum to 100% (e.g., "Varied Other," "Organization Design," "Globalization"). We use numbers reported in this table to assert substantive significance, not statistical significance. Numbers are percentages of overall term usage, by journal community.

For example, the Business and Management communities, in addition to being concerned with Value Creation as a global frame, also talk about an abstract theory of how to do business. In contrast, the Marketing, Advertising, and Purchasing communities use *business model* to talk about Relationship Management. The data show that the distribution of talk for the last four frames varies across communities. These four frames proxy local talk. In general, communities use the keyword *business model* in ways suited to their local needs. They do this while remaining sensitive to its global overtones, as evidenced by patterns at that level.

The differential distribution of the first and last four frames provides additional evidence for the global-local tension. The four most prominent frames display a similar pattern of distribution across communities (the global presence), whereas the four least prominent frames are individually tailored (the local alternatives). Not all communities use all the local frames, and those that share local frames do not necessarily exhibit similar patterns of sharing.

Although the global-local tension exists, no one frame supplants, co-opts, or otherwise subsumes any other. The data collectively evidence (1) trends for a global presence, (2) shifts in its substantive meaning, and (3) persistence of local frames. In sum, analyses reveal that frames with global use do not discourage the diversity of local usages. This finding is consistent with the results in Table IV, where frames with statistically significant standardized residuals comprised the global theme. The local tension is present at the same time and is seen in the nonsignificant cell values.[8] In a Wuthnowian sense, this allows for a substantive inference about persisting contestation across local subgroups amid the development of a dominant, global meaning.

CONCLUSION: KEYWORD ANALYSIS AND CULTURAL COHERENCE

Talk about the Digital Economy emphasizes changes in culture and economy. We do not make causal inferences on the relationship between the Digital Economy as an instance of cultural change and the proliferation of keywords such as *business model*. We use the advent of the Digital Economy as a natural experiment to investigate the spread of *business model*

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[8]We repeated this analysis for the least prominent communities of discourse as well (e.g., Strategy and Economics, Manufacturing and Engineering, Communications, and Investments and Insurance). Results reveal the same trends for this group. In other words, the same four frames comprise the global meaning. Local frames persist that are relevant for particular communities. These more detailed results are available upon request.

as an economic keyword across diverse communities of discourse. We argue that meanings of a keyword (measured empirically as frames) spread according to time- and community-dependent patterns. Evidence from chi-square tests suggests that these are not random distributions.

These findings bring replicable and formalist analysis to the problem of meaning as it unfolded during one period of cultural change. The findings also allow for theoretical advancement: (1) they suggest a resolution to the problem of articulation or the global-local tension; (2) they offer a discourse-centered perspective in an area where there has been considerable actor-centered research; (3) they reconsider Wuthnow's local-to-global sequence and offer a competing hypothesis for how keyword meanings spread over time; (4) they counter the tendency in much cultural sociology to highlight descriptive tendencies while neglecting pattern-seeking; and (5) they demystify the relationship between keywords and cultural change.

The notion of an unsettled time is critical to our argument. Keywords most powerfully orient conversations around shared systems of meaning during such periods. In unsettled times more potential usages become available, keywords become inflected with contested meanings, and the global-local tension is most visible. The Digital Economy is an example of an unsettled time during which we find evidence of keyword proliferation.

Our research has reframed and reversed the problem of articulation into the global-local tension to explore the impact of cultural change on the diverse ways that *business model* is used as a keyword within and across communities of discourse. Keywords provide a powerful vocabulary of culture and society. We investigate how the Digital Economy, as a proxy for an unsettled time, is associated with the use of the keyword *business model*. Our keyword analysis suggests that a global meaning is established when disparate communities of discourse establish collective, though not necessarily unanimous, agreement on what is meant by a keyword. The local, on the other hand, is tailored individually to generating communities without much regard for common usage. What becomes of this global-local tension?

Standard arguments would propose that business model public talk would either (1) efface proximal terms like *business strategy* and *revenue model* or (2) become standardized around agreed-upon meaning (e.g., Value Creation, as suggested by many strategy scholars). Our analyses support neither of these claims. Competing terms persist even while business model public talk increases dramatically, which it does according to a global meaning and locally tailored usages. Although we use the language of "tension" to describe this, some qualification is useful. The global and local co-exist in tension not in the sense of overt hostility, but in terms of different frames connected to contending logics. This tension is productive for the

cultural order since the same frames are interpreted in ways that facilitate general consensus and community specific interpretations. In the case of the keyword *business model*, the differences and thus the tension contribute to stability. The result is not cultural anarchism but cultural pluralism. Diversity is a source of strength rather than disintegration. New talk about keywords propels all talk while not necessarily supplanting old talk about related keywords.

The empirical analyses indicate that global and local frames both proliferate without one supplanting or co-opting the other. How can we understand this paradoxical pattern?[9] We show that the spread of a global meaning is mediated by the persistence of locally situated patterns of public talk. Importantly, the global-local tension is sustained by providing primacy across communities of discourse to a small collection of frames (i.e., the global meaning) while maintaining a plurality of locally relevant frames within communities (i.e., the local interpretations). Analyses reveal this pattern to be statistically significant. The presence of nonsignificant frames in Table IV suggests that local communities continue using a keyword in situated ways while being attentive to emerging global trends. We see concurrently global frames that standardize and local frames that persist.

The distribution of the Tacit Conception frame further supports these claims, suggesting that communities of discourse sometimes feel that keyword meanings do not require explication. The emergence of a common, global pattern of frames across communities while local uses persist, and the inclusion of the Tacit Conception frame in this common pattern is evidence for a distinct mechanism for the spread of keyword meanings over time. This mechanism resolves the global-local tension by according primacy to neither global nor local usages while allaying the problem of meaning within and across communities of discourse.

If global meanings fully accounted for the use of a keyword, we would not expect to see the persisting heterogeneity of local usages. Instead, we would expect one of two patterns. There would be either a random distribution of talk because each community would be working according to its own local uses, or different communities would standardize around a common theme. We find neither.

Keywords chronicle and capture cultural change, and because of their multiple meanings, they show competing possibilities for how to organize everyday action. This tradition contends that cultural change is associated

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[9]Research in organization theory (e.g., Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999) and cultural sociology (e.g., Wuthnow, 1987) both assume relative and eventual homogeneity of language and meaning. Whether one stresses a functionalist or interest/power theorizing, the global-local tension and the process by which it is conciliated directs attention away from this view of sameness.

with debates over keywords that explore possible meanings, which then settle on novel though ultimately standardized meanings. We extend an assessment of keyword meanings to describe the nature of cultural change itself. Keywords such as *business model* may exist just below the societal radar for some time, often used in ways that are faithful to a literal translation (i.e., business models as computer simulations or computerized models of business processes). Schumpeterian-like innovations (technological, in this case) may cause a proliferation of public talk surrounding these keywords (e.g., Value Creation, Electronic Commerce, etc.). Once this boom in keyword use reaches a certain threshold, its salience may be used retrospectively to define a historical moment as culturally innovative and unsettled (see Weick, 1993)—as "eventful history" (Sewell, 1999).

We find the coexistence of global and local meanings—cultural pluralism as an answer to the problem of meaning. How true is this of keywords more generally? To answer this, we draw on a grounded theory of causal generalization (Shadish *et al.*, 2002) that builds on the principle of "surface similarity" or "proximal similarity" (Campbell, 1966). The analytic task is to identify similarities between our research design and the "prototypical characteristics" of the target of generalization. There are at least three important dimensions:

1. "Cultural catalyst." Periods of economic/technological change catalyze *business model* keyword use.
2. "Institutional context." Meaning diffusion within and across management communities.
3. Pace. Keyword usage spreads rapidly after the advent of the Digital Economy.

Our findings apply primarily to keywords generated within the same institutional context, such as the keyword *value creation*. However, we also know that managerial fads and fashions are ongoing phenomena (Abrahamson, 1991; Hirsch, 1972). Our findings may also generalize to keywords such as *governance*, generated by the rise of what is called "New Public Management" (Ferlie, 1996; Hood, 1991, 1995; Kaboolian, 1998; Lynn, 1998; Peters and Pierre, 1998; Stoker, 1998). But what about keywords propelled by a different cultural catalyst, within a different institutional context, or with a different pace? Such keywords would include *culture war*, *queer*, *globalization*, and *family values*, among many others. Although we cannot say for certain the extent to which our findings will hold across such diverse cases, we advise comparative studies of keywords that treat the above dimensions as independent variables and assess their relative influence on the relationship between keywords and cultural change.

Alternate patterns such as hybridization or the global juggernaut may result from different conditions.

The debate here is not over the veracity or reliability of keyword meanings. Instead, we start from the core claim that society does not comprise neat divisions of labor but rather limns overlapping and contested arenas of institutional and organizational activity (see Friedland and Alford, 1991). From this starting point, the analytic challenge is to recognize empirically the global-local tension at work in a variety of social, cultural, and economic venues.

Such a research program, at the intersection of cultural and organizational sociology, reinforces and extends current debates in cultural sociology on the relative coherence, or internal ordering, of cultural forms. Our study contributes to this debate empirically and by proposing a theoretical mechanism. In coherence debates, some argue that culture is coherent, systematic, continuous, exhibiting an internal logic that links culture to action (e.g., Alexander and Smith, 1993; Bourdieu, 1984; Geertz, 1973; Hofstede, 1980; LeVine, 1984; Malinowski, 1944; Mohr and Duquenne, 1997; Mohr and Lee, 2000). Others argue that culture and its varied forms are disorderly, disjointed, contradictory, fragmented, and unsystematic or at least heterogeneous in content and function (e.g., D'Andrade and Strauss, 1992; DiMaggio, 1997; Quinn, 1996; Swidler, 1986, 2001a, 2001b).

Our research suggests that both positions underspecify the central features of modern society as layered, sedimented, and contentious, with "more coherence" in some moments and contexts, characterized by a high degree of routinization and rationality, and "less coherence" in other moments and contexts, characterized by the different modes of cultural change we identify above. Read in this idiom, our results speak to the debate by presenting the global-local tension and by illustrating how it is conciliated. We align "more coherence" of culture with the global meaning of keywords. We then align "less coherence" of culture with the tension that inheres in the persisting and diverse local usages.

The mechanism we have identified by which the global-local tension achieves resolution contributes to debates in cultural sociology about the relative coherence of culture and offers a redirection. Our findings indicate that an analytic and practical space exists between the standard positions on coherence by incorporating a third possibility. Keywords can be disaggregated into their cultural building blocks through frame analysis. The resulting frames may be "contradictory, loosely-integrated, contested, mutable, and highly permeable" (Sewell, 1999:53). They nonetheless find common expression in the keyword, which works as a linguistic signifier marked by varying degrees of coherence at different times. Our findings empirically support the contention that "cultural worlds are com-

monly beset with internal contradictions" and that "it is common for potent cultural symbols to express contradictions as they express coherence" (Sewell, 1999:53; see also Friedland and Alford, 1991). Culture is at once more and less coherent. This holds for keywords and the global-local tension that arises in how diverse communities of discourse use keywords during unsettled times of cultural change.

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